

HREiR Action plan template (2023-2026)



| Details | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Institution name: | The Open University |
| Cohort number: | Cohort 8 |
| Date of submission: | 19-May-23 |
| Institutional context: | As indicated in the OU's new 5-year Research Plan, "[w]ithin our mission we state a commitment to create world-class research. This commitment has been strengthened by our University Strategy for 2022 to 2027 entitled "Learn and Live", in which a goal is to enhance our societal impact through research, enterprise and skills development. From the 5-year Research Plan: "To deliver on our ambitions for research and achieve our social mission, we need a more diverse staff and research student population to bring a broad range of perspectives and experiences into our research culture and environment. We need to reduce barriers to engage with research and focus resources to build the next generation of research leaders across our Faculties. |

The institutional audience* for this action plan includes (only include direct beneficiaries; complete or delete, as appropriate):

| Audience (direct beneficiaries of the action plan) | Number of | Comments |
|--|-----------|---|
| Research staff | 149 | In the OU context, we define researchers as those on Research T&Cs. This audience includes Research Assistants, Research Associates, Research Fellows and Senior Research Fellows. Please note the number is correct as of 31 January 2023 and will be updated monthly with data from People Services |
| Postgraduate researchers | N/A | Approaching 1000 postgraduate research students and a further 200 research students in 18 Affiliated Research Centres distributed across the world. The 6 year review included PGRS, but we decided not to include them going forward, although our actions might benefit this group. |
| Research and teaching staff | N/A | Around a 1000 academic staff work at the OU on research & teaching contracts. These (i.e. Lecturers/Senior Lecturers with 60% teaching & 40% research) have not been included in the past and will not be part of this audience, although our actions might benefit this group. |
| Teaching-only staff | N/A | Around 6000 Associate Lecturers (ALs) are employed at the OU. |
| Technicians | N/A | |
| Clinicians | N/A | |
| Professional support staff | N/A | |
| Other (please provide numbers and details): | N/A | |

| Complete for submission | | | | | | | | To be completed only when reporting on action plan | | |
|---|--|---|----------|----------------|--|---------------------|-----------------|--|---|--|
| Obligation | Action | Carried over from previous action plan? | Deadline | Responsibility | The targeted <u>impact</u> of the action (success measure) | Comments (optional) | Progress update | The actual <u>impact</u> of the action (reporting against the success measure) | Outcome (ongoing/carried forward/no further action) | |
| Environment and Culture | | | | | | | | | | |
| Awareness and engagement | | | | | | | | | | |
| The aims of these obligations are to work towards an open and inclusive research culture, and to ensure broad understanding and awareness of this amongst researchers. Overall the backward-looking plan has indicated that the OU performs above the UK sector on this part, and we will continue to monitor the situation. | | | | | | | | | | |
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| Wellbeing and mental health | | | | | | | | | | |
| The aims of these obligations are to champion positive wellbeing amongst researchers, both through appropriate training and enabling new ways of working. With the exception of dedicated training for line managers of researchers, the OU performs above average on this aspect. | | | | | | | | | | |
| EC13 | Promote good mental health and wellbeing through the effective management of workloads and people. | | | | | | | | | |

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HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

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| ECI4 | Ensure managers of researchers are effectively trained in relation to wellbeing and mental health. | Two new RCD training sessions have recently been added to our training portfolio: "Supporting your Research Staff with their Career Development" and "EDI workshop series". These sessions support and develop new and existing researcher managers on institutional policies and practices. Workshops will also give opportunity for managers to discuss current practices and challenges with each other providing a safe space for concerns and development of practice. It is anticipated that these sessions would support and develop new and existing researcher managers on institutional policies and practices. We would need to evaluate the uptake and effectiveness of these two training workshops. Attendees will be required to complete satisfaction evaluation surveys. This would allow us to review the success of the workshops and ensure they tie into OU Central policies and practices relating to management training and EDI. | Yes | Sep-24 | RDCSG - Chair | Improved awareness and training of line managers of researchers. 1) Attendance records and evaluation results (i.e., OU benchmark 85% satisfied) ; 2) Successful pilot implementation for at least 5 line managers; 3) Successful implementation training for at least 10 line managers across the four faculties. 4) Evaluation feedback survey produced for all attendees to consider impact against people services measures and EDI policy and practices within the OU | | | | |
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| Bullying and harassment | | | | | | | | | | |
| The aims of these obligations are to eliminate bullying and harassment in the research system, tackled through progressive policies and secure mechanisms to address incidents. The OU is performing above the sector on this aspect, and we will continue to monitor the situation. | | | | | | | | | | |
| ECI3 | Promote a healthy working environment through effective policies and practice for tackling discrimination, bullying and harassment, including providing appropriate support for those reporting issues. | | | | | | | | | |
| ECM3 | Ensure managers encourage reporting and addressing incidents of discrimination, bullying and harassment. | | | | | | | | | |
| ECR4 | Ensure researchers use available mechanisms to report staff who fail to meet the expected standards of behaviour in relation to discrimination, harassment and bullying. | | | | | | | | | |
| Equality, diversity and inclusion | | | | | | | | | | |
| The aims of these obligations are to ensure managers and researchers are trained in-, aware of- and adopt practices enhancing equality, diversity and inclusion. The OU is performing above the sector on this aspect, and we will continue to monitor the situation together with our Athena Swan and Race Equality Charter submissions. | | | | | | | | | | |
| ECI4 / ECM1 | Ensure managers undertake relevant training and development opportunities related to equality, diversity and inclusion, and put this into practice in their work. | | | | | | | | | |
| ECR2 | Ensure researchers act in accordance with employer and funder policies related to equality, diversity and inclusion. | | | | | | | | | |
| Research Integrity | | | | | | | | | | |
| The aims of these obligations are to ensure managers and researchers are trained in-, aware of- and maintain high standards of research integrity, and are able to report infringements or misconduct. The OU is performing above the sector on this aspect, and we will continue to monitor the situation together with our Research Integrity Concordat. | | | | | | | | | | |
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| Policy development | | | | | | | | | | |
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| The aims of these obligations are to encourage all researchers to actively contribute to the development of policies driving positive change at their institution. <i>While some progress has been made, we want to continue to increase policy engagement by researchers</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| E17 | Consider researchers and their managers as key stakeholders within the institution and provide them with formal opportunities to engage with relevant organisational policy and decision-making. | Following OU Research Plan Next Generation, Research Fellowship Academy, and Faculty initiatives in WELS and FASS, we aim to support establish self-organising community of researchers (and managers), facilitated by one of representatives of RDCSG under the leadership of the Chair who will report to the PVC R&I (May 2024) | Yes | May-25 | People Services, Head of Research Strategy and Governance Reporting to RDCSG Chair and PVC R&I | 1) Establishment of self-organising Researchers Community; 2) Attendance data to Researchers Community increase by 10%; 3) Representation at formal OU Research Committees improvement by 10% | | | | |
| ECM5 | Encourage managers to engage with opportunities to contribute to policy development aimed at creating a more positive research environment and culture within their institution. | | | | | | | | | |
| EM5 | Engage with opportunities to contribute to relevant policy development within their institution. | | | | | | | | | |
| ECR5 | Encourage researchers to consider opportunities to contribute to policy development aimed at creating a more positive research environment and culture within their institution. | | | | | | | | | |
| ER4 | Recognise and act on their role as key stakeholders within their institution and the wider academic community. | Following CEDARS 62% of respondents indicated to be interested in institutional policy and decision making. Continued engagement with Athena Swan, DORA, Technician Concordate and Race Equality Charter development. In line with E17, 1) Ensure that researchers are represented on relevant OU governance committees (December 2024); 2) Demonstrable participation as stakeholders in the committee structure valued and audited within the promotions processes as experience of academic citizenship, leadership or administration, but not made mandatory (April 2025). | Yes | Dec-25 | Line Managers reporting to Faculty ADR's and Exec Deans/OU Governance office - Assistant Director Governance | 1) % of representation of researchers on relevant OU governance committees improves over time of representative level of all staff employed at OU; 2) recognition of value of participation in OU governance as part of CDSA appraisal (April 2025). Continued engagement with external Charters to ensure commitment to values and aims of the institution. | | | | |
| Employment | | | | | | | | | | |
| Recruitment and induction | | | | | | | | | | |
| The aims of these obligations are to ensure recruitment of researchers is open and fair and researchers receive effective inductions into the organisation. <i>The OU is performing above the sector on this aspect, and we will continue to monitor the situation together with our Race Equality Charter submission.</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| E11 | Ensure open, transparent and merit-based recruitment, which attracts excellent researchers, using fair and inclusive selection and appointment practices. | | | | | | | | | |
| E12 | Provide an effective induction, ensuring that researchers are integrated into the community and are aware of policies and practices relevant to their position. | | | | | | | | | |
| Recognition, reward and promotion | | | | | | | | | | |
| The aims of these obligations are to ensure the fair and inclusive recognition of researchers as part of their career progression. <i>The OU is performing above the sector on this aspect, and we will continue to monitor the situation together with People Services</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| E13 | Provide clear and transparent merit-based recognition, reward and promotion pathways that recognise the full range of researchers' contributions and the diversity of personal circumstances. | | | | | | | | | |
| EM3 | Managers commit to, and evidence, the inclusive, equitable and transparent recruitment, promotion and reward of researchers. | | | | | | | | | |
| Responsibilities and reporting | | | | | | | | | | |
| The aims of these obligations are to ensure that researchers and their managers understand and act on their obligations and responsibilities. <i>The OU is performing above the sector on this aspect, and we will continue to monitor the situation together with People Services</i> | | | | | | | | | | |

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| EM2 | Managers familiarise themselves, and work in accordance with, relevant employment legislation and codes of practice, institutional policies, and the terms and conditions of grant funding. | | | | | | | | | |
| ER1 | Researchers ensure that they work in accordance with, institutional policies, procedures and employment legislation, as well as the requirements of their funder. | | | | | | | | | |
| ER2 | Researchers understand their reporting obligations and responsibilities. | | | | | | | | | |
| People management | | | | | | | | | | |
| The aims of these obligations are to ensure that researchers are well-managed and have effective and timely performance reviews. | | | | | | | | | | |
| EI4 | Provide effective line and project management training opportunities for managers of researchers, heads of department and equivalent. | See ECI4 | Yes | Feb-23 | People Business Partner; People Services to be reviewed to RCDSG Chair and Steering Group | See ECI4 | | | | |
| EI5 | Ensure that excellent people management is championed throughout the organisation and embedded in institutional culture, through annual appraisals, transparent promotion criteria, and workload allocation. | | | | | | | | | |
| EM1 | Managers undertake relevant training and development opportunities so that they can manage researchers effectively and fulfil their duty of care. | | | | | | | | | |
| EM4 | Managers actively engage in regular constructive performance management with their researchers. | | | | | | | | | |
| ER3 | Researchers positively engage with performance management discussions and reviews with their managers. | | | | | | | | | |
| Job security | | | | | | | | | | |
| The aim of this obligation is to improve the job security of researchers. The OU will continue to monitor this as the % of FTC relative to permanent contract researchers is slightly above the sector | | | | | | | | | | |
| EI6 | Seek to improve job security for researchers, for example through more effective redeployment processes and greater use of open-ended contracts, and report on progress. | In line with Job security and OU Research Plan, we aim to: 1) Inform researchers from the start about their contract situation (e.g., Faculty business planning cycle and unit strategy to be explained to all FTC researchers and managers of researchers at 6 months into contract, at start for contracts under 12 months, or on request. All staff with research responsibilities to practically understand the mechanisms, requirements and timeframes for creating and maintaining open-ended contracts. To include worked examples, access to bridging funding, and key differences between Schools or career paths that would be a likely priority for redeployment); 2) Review an institutional Resourcing Plan that aims to balance FTC and open ended contracts appropriately, given funding constraints and in alignment with the Research Plan. 3) Review success on approximately six monthly basis and identify any additional actions required 4) Review reports from People Services on a 6 monthly basis to investigate the use of FTCs and aim to improve practices and share outcomes with the Next Generation team in RES | Yes | Aug-26 | Head of Business Partners, People Services. Lead of Next Generation. Services to be reviewed to RCDSG Chair and Steering Group | See PCD1 | For 2) we envision to develop an institutional Research Strategy and funding packages that support excellent researchers to be hired on open-ended contracts. This would better utilise and recognise the benefits to the University, especially through organisational effectiveness, resiliency and flexibility, that arise from employee job security and experience gained through length of service, along with an obligation to provide the maximum degree of job security to its staff. The OU to investigate the costs and benefits of alternative management structures (workload, awards and finance) to increase individuals' time being allocated across a range of research projects and activities, supported by a range of internal and external | (Continued from previous) ... models for investigation could include developing a cohort of 'Chancellor's Fellows' in cross-faculty research pool(s), reduce the current presumption that researchers tend to be employed upon single-project & single source of funding Fixed Term Contracts. Written guidance to be produced and disseminated on the contractual status of research-only contracts with respect to gaining experience of teaching through module production, presentation or tutoring. Monitoring would need to ensure this is provided not just to new-starters, but also at promotions or role changes that create new responsibilities for research or the management of research. Desk review of barriers, possibly led by RAS/Faculty Research Offices (e.g. UK Space Agency requirements for postdocs to be >50% FTE minimum and to be on fixed-term contracts rather than permanent). Overall aim is to increase the flexibility and resilience of the OU Research community rather than to introduce new barriers to grant development. To be integrated with point 1 (induction briefings) so that an example career pathway and financial base can be shared with new researchers and managers of researchers. | | |

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| Professional and Career Development | | | | | | | | | | |
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| Championing professional development | | | | | | | | | | |
| The aims of these obligations are to promote the importance of professional development and ensure researchers have the time to engage in it. The OU will need to develop an appropriate format for recording PD activities for researchers. | | | | | | | | | | |
| PCDI1 | Provide opportunities, structured support, encouragement and time for researchers to engage in a minimum of 10 days professional development pro rata per year, recognising that researchers will pursue careers across a wide range of employment sectors. | 1) Align with OU Research Plan/Next Generation stream to investigate an appropriate mechanism to record, monitor, and evaluate professional development time (April 2024); 2) Pilot test recording mechanism (September 2024); 3) Implement recording mechanism across the OU (September 2025) | Yes | Sep-25 | Senior Manager Research Career Development and Chair RDCSG | 1) Appropriate mechanism to record, monitor and evaluate PD time through recording data of new and existing research staff through WAM meetings with line managers and recording with ADR per faculty; 2) Successful uptake of approach during pilot showing impact and development of career development by 10%; 3) Successful adoption by majority of researchers of PD approach considered through survey feedback provided by researchers of impact of pilot on career development with the institution | | | | |
| PCDI6 | Monitor, and report on, the engagement of researchers and their managers with professional development activities. | | | | | | | | | |
| PCDM3 | Managers allocate a minimum of 10 days pro rata per year, for their researchers to engage with professional development, supporting researchers to balance the delivery of their research and their own professional development. | | | | | | | | | |
| PCDR1 | Researchers take ownership of their career, identifying opportunities to work towards career goals, including engaging in a minimum of 10 days professional development pro rata per year. | See PCDI1 | Yes | Sep-25 | Senior Manager Research Career Development and Chair RDCSG | See PCDI1 | | | | |
| Career development reviews | | | | | | | | | | |
| The aims of these obligations are to ensure researchers and their managers are engaging in productive career development reviews. The OU is performing above the sector on this aspect, and we will continue to monitor the situation together with People Services | | | | | | | | | | |
| PCDI2 | Provide training, structured support, and time for managers to engage in meaningful career development reviews with their researchers. | | | | | | | | | |
| PCDI6 | Monitor, and report on, the engagement of researchers and their managers with researcher career development reviews. | | | | | | | | | |
| PCDM1 | Managers engage in regular career development discussions with their researchers, including holding a career development review at least annually. | | | | | | | | | |
| PCDR4 | Researchers positively engage in career development reviews with their managers. | | | | | | | | | |
| Career development support and planning | | | | | | | | | | |
| The aims of these obligations are to promote researchers' career development planning through tailored support and gathering evidence of professional experience. The OU is performing above the sector on this aspect, and we will continue to monitor the situation together with People Services | | | | | | | | | | |
| PCDI3 | Ensure that researchers have access to professional advice on career management, across a breadth of careers. | | | | | | | | | |
| PCDR3 | Researchers maintain an up-to-date professional career development plan and build a portfolio of evidence demonstrating their experience, that can be used to support job applications. | | | | | | | | | |
| THE CDA | | | | | | | | | | |
| The aims of these obligations are to provide researchers with opportunity to progress in their careers by developing their research identity and leadership capabilities. | | | | | | | | | | |

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| PCDI4 | Provide researchers with opportunities, and time, to develop their research identity and broader leadership skills. | | | | | | | | |
| PCDM4 | Managers identify opportunities, and allow time (in addition to the 10 days professional development allowance), for their researchers to develop their research identity and broader leadership skills, and provide appropriate credit and recognition for their endeavours. | See PCDI1. Building on this we need to ensure that managers of researchers will provide PD opportunities for their researchers. | Yes | Apr-26 | Senior Manager Research Career Development and Chair RDCSG | See PCDI1 | | | |
| PCDM5 | Managers engage in leadership and management training to enhance their personal effectiveness, and to promote a positive attitude to professional development. | See ECI4 | Yes | Sep-25 | RDCSG - Chair | See ECI4 | | | |
| PCDR5 | Researchers to seek out, and engage with, opportunities to develop their research identity and broader leadership skills | | | | | | | | |
| Diverse careers | | | | | | | | | |
| The aims of these obligations are to recognise, value and prepare researchers for the wide range of career options available to them within and beyond research. | | | | | | | | | |
| PCDI5 | Recognise that moving between, and working across, employment sectors can bring benefits to research and researchers, and support opportunities for researchers to experience this. | | | | | | | | |
| PCDM2 | Managers support researchers in exploring and preparing for a diversity of careers, for example, through the use of mentors and careers professionals, training, and secondments. | | | | | | | | |
| PCDR2 | Researchers explore and prepare for a range of employment options across different sectors, such as by making use of mentors, careers professionals, training and secondments. | | | | | | | | |
| PCDR6 | Researchers consider opportunities to develop their awareness and experience of the wider research system through, for example, knowledge exchange, policy development, public engagement and commercialisation. | | | | | | | | |

* The Researcher Development Concordat defines researchers as individuals whose primary responsibility is to conduct research and who are employed specifically for this purpose by a higher education institution or research institute. The primary audience is research staff, e.g. postdoctoral researchers, research fellows, research assistants. The Researcher Development Concordat encourages institutions to include other groups who actively engage in research as beneficiaries of their Concordat action plan. These could be postgraduate researchers; staff on teaching and research, or teaching contracts; clinicians; professional support staff; technicians.

| Further hyperlinks and supplementary information (more rows can be added) | |
|---|---|
| 1 | https://www.open.ac.uk/research/governance/integrity |
| 2 | https://openuniv.sharepoint.com/sites/intranet-equality-diversity-inclusion |
| 3 | https://healthassuredeap.co.uk/ |
| 4 | https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/publications/how-manage-and-reduce-stress |
| 5 | https://www.open.ac.uk/research/governance/integrity |
| 6 | https://www.open.ac.uk/research/governance/research-integrity/research-integrity-statement-2023 |
| 7 | https://www.open.ac.uk/research/sites/www.open.ac.uk.research/files/files/Documents/procedure-for- |
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| Abbreviations and glossary (more rows can be added) | |
|---|---|
| RDCSG | Research Development CareerSteering Group |
| OU | Open University |
| EDI | Equality, Diversity and Inclusion |
| KPI | Key Policy Indicators |
| EIA | Equality Impact Assessment |
| GESG | Gender Equality Steering Group |
| EAP | Employee Assistance Programme |
| RCD | Researcher Career Development |
| RES | Research , Enterprise and Scholarship |
| AWM | Academic Workload Management |
| CEDARS | Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey |
| WELS | Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies |
| FASS | Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences |
| FBL | Faculty of Business and Law |
| STEM | Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics |
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